

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by WILLIAM S. IVANS, SSA President

The pages of *Soaring* in the year just past give evidence, in many ways, of the continued growth of your Society and of soaring activities in general.

Looking back, we may count among the high points of 1963 a fine U.S. performance in the World Championships at Junin; a record turnout for a highly competitive U.S. Nationals at Elmira; increasingly good regional competitions; Ben Green's World Goal record, shortly afterwards eclipsed by Al Parker's 487-mile goal flight from Odessa, Texas, to Great Bend, Kansas; Paul Bikle's selection as recipient of the soaring world's highest award, the Lilienthal Medal, and his further distinction as having flown farther than anyone else without (or with!) a barograph; and the unveiling by Floyd Sweet of Ralph Barnaby's bronze soaring memorial plaque at historic Kitty Hawk, N.C.

Soaring Society membership has maintained its steady rate of growth, to a record high of some 3500 active members at the close of the year. Corollary statistics indicate an increase in flying activity and in the numbers and quality of gliders. The ABC training program has gathered momentum and promises to provide a framework for uniform and comprehensive training of new soaring pilots. FAI Badge activity, as good a measure as we have of proficiency flying by a broad spectrum of pilots, was at a record level in 1963. New Chapters of the *American Soaring Handbook* have been published; others are in process.

On the negative side of our ledger for the year, we must count an accident record which includes several fatalities; we can never call a year successful in which one of our fellow pilots has been killed or injured.

The proliferation of airspace restrictions remains a very serious threat to the free flight of gliders or any other aircraft, and if carried to the "everything under positive control" limit which some of the federal planners espouse, could end glider flying as we know it now. There appear to be solid factual arguments to support the con-

tinued use of most airspace on a see-and-be-seen basis, with minimal risk of air collision; the great problem appears to be one of making factual arguments effective in the face of established control programs, emotional reactions, and a body of set and seemingly impregnable attitudes ("conventional wisdom", as Philip Wills calls it, quoting a U.S. author). The SSA has joined with other organizations in what promises to be a continuous battle to preserve a maximum of free airspace, without which, as previously stated, all of our remaining problems are academic.

Close contact has been maintained with FAA headquarters in helping to define procedures for high altitude glider flights in positive control airspace without having to maintain radio contact with control centers or carry the otherwise mandatory radar transponders. Other discussions have led to proposals for a new cloud flying rating, presently in the FAA chain of departmental approvals; continued exemption of glider pilots from physical exam requirements; and easing of restrictions on towplane certification and towing.

Our status as a Division of the National Aeronautic Association has received considerable attention during the past year. An impending financial crisis within NAA has resulted in a reduction of NAA staff, curtailment of certain services, a re-examination of objectives and a search for new sources of income. Among the income proposals is an increase in the franchise fee paid annually to NAA by SSA and other Divisions, to more nearly approximate actual NAA costs in providing us with record homologation and other services under the FAI Aero Club Charter. This proposal and related items will be acted upon at the February 8, 9 SSA Board meeting in Dallas.

Your Society operates on a balanced budget. Most of its income is from membership dues; most of its expenses stem from publication of *Soaring* and payment of salaries to a small, hard-pressed, permanent staff headed by our highly competent and conscientious executive secretary, Lloyd Licher. A

wide variety of essential services are provided by unpaid, usually un-sung members serving on the many important permanent committees, or volunteering to take on special tasks for which they may be particularly well qualified, as in writing chapters of the *American Soaring Handbook*.

Much of the time of your staff is spent in publication and distribution of *Soaring*, plus the welcome but increasingly massive basic clerical workload which accompanies the growth in membership. A special task in 1964 will be preparation and publication of a new Directory; none was published in 1963, owing to budget limitations. An increasingly useful stock of brochure material and other literature has been developed to help answer the many hundreds of requests for aid and information which are received each year. In mid-1963 the SSA office was moved from the Executive Secretary's home to larger, rented quarters at the nearby Santa Monica airport, permitting more efficient operations and providing space for continued growth.

We are, in short, a healthy, growing Society with an established modus operandi and, I believe, excellent prospects for continuation of growth and a gradual expansion of services to membership.

There is, however, no reason for us to believe that we have achieved any sort of optimum relationship between the Society's administration and its membership. Any satisfaction at being where we are must be tempered by the near certainty that we could have done better by expending our resources in other directions, or by apportioning them differently on presently acknowledged tasks, if only we had the wisdom to better distinguish these directions and priorities.

Let me commend to your attention an editorial by Pete Bowers, reprinted in this issue of *Soaring* following its recent publication in the *Towline* of the Seattle Glider Council. This editorial is frankly critical of the SSA and of some trends in soaring outside of SSA purview. Many will disagree with Pete on some of his points, but his views are to be respected. There is no questioning that this is a thoughtful and serious statement of

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